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★ AUG 03 2022 ★

20-582(MKB)

BROOKLYN OFFICE

7.26.2022



Dear Clerk of Court,

Please construe this correspondence as supporting artifacts in relation to my sentencing for the Court to consider.

Thank you,

RAZA SIKANDAR # 20832509
MDC - Brooklyn

TRULINCS 20832509 - SIKANDER, RAZA HASAN - Unit: BRO-K-B

FROM: 20832509
TO: Wallenstein-Office, John
SUBJECT: STEPS Update
DATE: 07/26/2022 09:15:41 PM

Mr. Wallenstein,

I wanted to provide you with an update of what I have been able to accomplish thus far for STEPS.

As of now, I have secured a shared office space in Manhattan with a back office team; set-up an initial website that's still under development: www.steps-nyc.com [working on securing .org domain as well]; obtained a non-profit tax identification number; formulated the advisory board & selected the initial executive directors which are all hand-picked for their extensive background experiences in their respective areas - and of important note, which all were or still are incarcerated inmates from MDC-Brooklyn.

The initial working team will be Omar Amanat as Development Director, Irfan Amanat as Technology Director, Naim Ishmael as Finance Director, Jesus Concepcion as Chief of Staff/Human Resources Director and myself as the Executive Director. I have also modeled the initial profiles for the two teams that will be needed to assist prisoners in-custody & out-custody; am in-process of executing a joint teaming agreement with the ALEPH Jewish prisoner network/organization for feedback on the implementation procedures of the dedicated prisoner-accessible telephone numbers, prisoner-accessible emails for TRULINKS, prisoner-accessible resource materials and the full spectrum requirements to allow for future volunteer workshops. Please update this information for your records. As STEPS is a platform that connects existing Federal, State, City and Municipal funded organizations that support youths to adults who are currently or who have been incarcerated, I am going to start contacting various entities to initiate partnership agreements.

Regards,

Raza Sikandar

TRULINCS 20832509 - SIKANDER, RAZA HASAN - Unit: BRO-K-B

FROM: 20832509

TO: Agniska, Deenihan; Murzaokava, Anna; Pyna, Tyna; Wallenstien-Office, John

SUBJECT: STEPS Overview

DATE: 04/30/2022 03:23:28 PM

Dr. Neni Panaurgia, PhD - Columbia University; Justice & Education Initiative (JEI)

By: Raza Sikandar, MLS, LLM

Request for Support on Non-Profit Organization Project: STEPS (Structures That Enable Prisoner Stability)

STEPS is a three-step anti-recidivism initiative (Assess, Involve & Maintain [AIM]) that focuses on helping prisoners adjust to ten core structures within society prior to and after their release from incarceration. Its genesis originated when Raza Sikandar, a prisoner at the Federal Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Brooklyn, New York, was participating in college classes offered by Columbia University's Justice & Education Initiative. While learning about structural instabilities in Dr. Neni Panaurgia's Ethnography class, he saw a correlation between anthropological instabilities faced in societies and the issues that he and many of his fellow prisoners suffered. He theorized that the underlying drivers of crime were the imbalances of individuals adjusting to core structures such as education, jobs, health, finances, housing, and others listed below.*

After reflecting on his own experiences of the underlying instabilities that led him to being incarcerated, Mr. Sikandar understood that there was a combination of factors that needed to be addressed and a one size fits all policy led by previous programming proved to be ineffective. The deeper he reflected, the more animated he became to correct not only his own situation, but the current prison eco-system starting with MDC. STEPS is designed to help pivot the criminal justice system from a punitive to a rehabilitation position in lock-step with the almost all other highly developed nations. The expansion of the prison industrial complex over the last several decades has resulted in the USA having less than 4% of the world's population and over 25% of the worlds incarcerated (over 2.2 million Americans incarcerated at this very moment).

Marinating on these reflections, Mr. Sikandar first noticed that while there were some re-entry providers offering an assortment of assistance to individuals typically post-incarceration, a majority of prisoners remained unaware that these support services even existed. In this area, he saw that there was a disconnect between prisoners seeking assistance and potential program providers. STEPS attempts to address this issue by becoming the bridge between prisoners and program providers. It works with the providers and institution staff helping coordinate and facilitate support, but from the prisoners perspective. STEPS plans to hold quarterly workshops within target institutions starting with MDC, to educate prisoners of the resources available. It also will have a dedicated contact telephone line reachable by inmates through the prison phone systems (most re-entry providers do not accept calls from prisoners) and will have email support addresses for inmates that have that capability such as federal prisoners (TRULINKS).

Second, Mr. Sikandar observed that while there were anti-recidivism programs offered at MDC, a majority of prisoners were unmotivated to participate in these programs. He held a survey which revealed that: a) many prisoners didn't understand the benefits of program participation; b) education was something that many of them had failed at in primary and secondary school and re-living that feeling of failure was painful to re-visit; c) there was little incentive to participate; d) there were financial constraints preventing most from post-secondary education; e) many were intimidated and/or afraid by the prospect of projecting inferiority in front of program staff and other inmates; and f) there wasn't a vigorous professionally administered remedial education curriculum being executed in the prison environment. For example, none of the education department staff at MDC actually educate the prisoners. Inmates such as Mr. Sikandar participate in a basic 2 hour tutor training class then tutor other inmates to pass the GED exam. To offset these issue, STEPS will design its program material to be easily understandable, illustrate the many benefits of program participation, help develop a vigorous educational curriculum with partner universities taught by qualified educators while expanding on-site and remote learning capabilities, lobby for more qualified academic staff to teach prisoners, and involve itself as early as possible with prisoners through it's robust networking and outreach efforts with partner organizations.

Third, a seismic shift is now occurring in the way of recent prison reform efforts stemming from insightful judicial and political administrations, countless motivators, advocates, volunteers, progressive legislation and the Black Lives Matter Movement. These entities highlight the massive amount of aggregated research that establish mass incarceration & longer prison sentences have little punitive and rehabilitation value to society and that "aging out" and higher education have a much more potent effect on recidivism. As part of these reform efforts, the recent lifting of the 1994 Federal Pell Grant ban within the Higher Education Act is one of those shifts. The ban, implemented as part of the "Get Tough on Crime" rhetoric of the 1990's, devastated post-secondary education programs within the prison system, a time tested and proven method to reduce recidivism. Now with this development taking effect in 2022/2023, prisoners have a second chance of real reform. And with the

Pell Grant comes another little known entitlement to prisoners... a yearly financial incentive called the HOPE tax credit of \$2,500 for undergraduate study expenses given by the United States Government for the first four years of their participation.

Lastly, and likely the most rewarding for prisoners, is the recent implementation with the First Step Act, which allows earning extra time off of some prisoners sentences through faster diversion to a halfway house and/or home confinement upon completion in anti-recidivism programs. This trifecta of incentives is enough to adequately package and offer prisoners the needed motivation to increase their scope of participation. The common theme garnished on the survey was that formerly incarcerated prisoners stated that support programs connected with them too late, usually when they were being discharged, and now these former prisoners were more eager to catch up with their lives than spend time participating in intensive re-entry programs. As the AIM of STEPS is to work with prisoners before they are released, and to maintain support after release, STEPS will be there to facilitate on these critical issues which prisoners need to successfully re-integrate back into society and not re-offend.

In conclusion, a major driver of crime is the imbalance of the individual due to the structural instabilities that they face in society which prevent them from being productive law-abiding citizens. By holistically approaching these problems and offering a solution by becoming the main point of contact (facilitator) between prisoners and providers, STEPS, hopes to become the gold standard of the bridging that needs to be implemented in this sector. Being an independent third party non-profit organization will allow unimpeded support and limit the constraints and "red-tape" of other entities as it deploys its services. The needs of prisoners today is changing. It is multifaceted and robust. Many lack the crucial elements of adapting to societies structures and thus engage in a pattern of crime after release. STEPS remedial and post-secondary educational efforts partnered with Columbia University's Justice and Education Initiative for the MDC and MCC prison populations will be the first of it's kind and the initial pilot program. Funding for the non-profit shall come from the Second Chance Act, the Department of Education, Department of Health, the Department of Justice and other public and private entities.** STEPS will work with the BOP and state administrations in conjuncture with health and education departments to identify the needs of the prison population and set-up quarterly strategy session with all stakeholders, initiate a rolling admissions protocol, help develop a college remedial (prepatory) curriculum consisting of Math, English, Science, History, Current Events, Study Skills and Time Management to be administered through college professors in conjunction with current GED efforts and continue to organically update its processes.

Workshops on Resume Writing, Effective Oral and Presentation Skills, Career Development, Anger Management, Leadership and Goal Setting, Etiquette, Parenting, Dress for Success, Financial Management, Professionalism and Productive Relationships in the workplace shall be held bi-weekly within the institution.

Structures* of Focus:

- 1) Education/Vocation - It is proven that education reduces recidivism. STEPS plans to develop and expand existing remedial and post-secondary education programs by implementing remote learning in prisons, helping to transform the prison environment into one of rehabilitation. STEPS will lobby for increased funding for educators within the prison environment and help expand current education departments of institutions, facilitating community colleges/university programming within the institution and help develop prison curriculum for vocational/trade schools in future trades like electric automotive technicians, renewable energy installers, forestry, waste management, environmental protection, social workers, and others in line with the Department of Labor and Statistics growth reports.
- 2) Career/Job- Using video conferencing technology, coordinating with employers to hire soon to be released prisoners into open positions, helping facilitate bonding and insurance of prisoners for employers to mitigate any potential losses and advertising open positions for prisoners to apply to. Partnering with online job boards like Monster, Indeed, LinkedIn and Career Builder as examples.
- 3) Housing- Work with partner organizations, federal, state and municipal housing authorities to provide housing to prisoners being released. Working with Residential Reentry Centers/ Halfway Houses.
- 4) Family/Friends Support- Providing phone numbers and emails with live agent support for prisoners, their families and friends to coordinate transition services, child care, parenting programs, and holiday gift support.
- 5) Holistic Health Care Services- Facilitating health care providers by engaging the "Obamacare" marketplace as every person is entitled to full healthcare. Support mental health services for the many prisoners that need ongoing counseling, psychology, psychiatry & substance abuse programs, help enrollment efforts with gym memberships, physical therapists and other medical providers.

6)Religion/Social Services- Facilitate with religious organizations & community organizations like the YMCA to provide ongoing support.

7)Government Support - Help prisoners ascertain drivers license, learning permits, state ID cards; provide third-party tax preparers on-site like H&R Block/Jackson Hewitt Tax services for HOPE credit access, help prisoners get there credit reports from the three credit agencies and hold workshops on how to clear and build credit. Lobby efforts to establish a Bureau of Anti-Recidivism/Rehabilitation within the Department of Justice/Department of Health and advocate for increased funding on the federal and state levels.

8)Gang Dismembership- Offering alternatives to gang membership with workshops, ongoing educational support and a safe drop-out protocol with dedicated units within the institution for this transitional period. Upon completion of rigorous anti-gang training, the eventual transfer to safe non-gang prison environments.

9)Mentoring/Buddy Program- Partner volunteers with recently released prisoners to provide mentoring services. Big Brother/Big Sister, Business related mentorships, university organizations.

10)Transportation Support- Work with local governments to provide free/discounted metro access, coordinating with online dealerships to help facilitate financing/leasing options for qualified prisoners being released that live in underdeveloped public transportation areas (as there credit scores/records will be stabilized prior to release), partnering with ride-sharing apps(Uber)

Pell Grant-- Federal funding for remedial and post-secondary education programs

First Step Act -- Incentivizes participation in Anti-Recidivism Programs allowing prisoners to earn time off their sentence

Second Chance Act-- Provides funding for support services such as STEPS

Hope Credit-- Financial tax incentive for students to offset school costs

Lifetime Learning Credit-- Tax deductions

Sunshine Lady Foundation**-- Doris Buffett privately donates millions of dollars to education prisoner programs

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The Honorable Maryo K. Brodie, Chief Judge
Clerk of Court
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